

P 180900Z SEP 92
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1900
INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY BEIJING
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
DIA WASHDC
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 05650

STATE FOR EAP/TB, NEA/INS, HA AND INM/AMB BORG
CINCPAC ALSO FOR FPA

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: PREL PHUM CH IN BM
SUBJECT: BURMA'S LEADER EXUDES CONFIDENCE -- AND A
SOFTER LINE

¶1. CONFIDENTIAL ENTIRE TEXT.

¶2. THE INDIAN AMBASSADOR TOLD CHARGE TODAY THAT HIS FAREWELL MEETING WITH GENERAL THAN SHWE ON SEPTEMBER 17 HAD REINFORCED HIS SENSE THAT RANGOON'S NEW HEAD OF STATE IS SOMEWHAT SERIOUS ABOUT LIBERALIZING BURMA -- AND ENCOUNTERING RESISTENCE ON THIS SCORE FROM POWERFUL INTELLIGENCE CHIEF KHIN NYUNT. ELABORATING, HE CHARACTERIZED THAN SHWE AS "ASSIDUOUSLY PEDDLING A SOFTER LINE" BOTH RE INDIAN-BURMESE RELATIONS AND INTERNAL POLITICAL EVOLUTION. THE GENERAL ADMITTED, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT THE MILITARY "CANNOT STAY IN POWER TOO LONG WITHOUT RISKING UNPOPULARITY" AND THAT BURMA'S "POOR ECONOMY WON'T RECOVER WITHOUT FOREIGN EXPERTISE AND INPUTS." THAN SHWE ALSO VENTURED THAT THE "FRACTIONING (SIC: FRAGMENTATION) OF BURMA CAN ONLY BE AVOIDED IF THE PEOPLE ARE BROUGHT IN AND CAN SHARE IN THE CAKE."

¶3. WHILE GENERAL THAN SHWE INTERLARDED THESE ADMISSIONS WITH MORE CONVENTIONAL GOB RHETORIC ON THE MILITARY'S CONTINUING ROLE IN KEEPING THE COUNTRY TOGETHER, HIS "LIBERAL" ADMISSIONS WENT WELL BEYOND THE NORM -- EVEN FOR PRIVATE TALKS. STRONGMAN KHIN NYUNT -- WHO SAT IN BUT WAS STUDIOUSLY KEPT OUT OF THE DISCOURSE BY THAN SHWE -- WAS CLEARLY DISCOMFORTED BY ALL THIS CANDOR. AT ONE POINT, THE INTELLIGENCE CHIEF EVEN VIGOROUSLY NODDED HIS HEAD IN DISAGREEMENT. COMMENT: DURING THAN SHWE'S TALK WITH THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR SOME MONTHS BACK, THE INTELLIGENCE CHIEF TWICE BROKE IN TO DISAGREE WITH HIS BOSS.

¶4. DURING THE DISCUSSION OF INDIAN-BURMESE RELATIONS, THAN SHWE CHARACTERIZED TIES AS "ON THE IMPROVE" BUT THEN FAULTED NEW DELHI FOR SOURING THE RELATIONSHIP IN THE FIRST PLACE, CHIEFLY BY ALLOWING ALL INDIA RADIO TO RUN AMOK. HOWEVER, HE CAREFULLY BALANCED THIS "HISTORICAL" CRITICISM BY OBSERVING THAT THE RECENT VISIT TO INDIA BY DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER AND REGIME INSIDER U AYE HAD GONE VERY WELL. LOOKING AHEAD, THAN SHWE HOPED THAT HIS FOREIGN MINISTER WOULD SOON GET AN INVITATION TO NEW DELHI. THE INDIAN AMBASSADOR RESPONDED BY NOTING THAT FURTHER POLITICAL PROGRESS IN BURMA WOULD EASE THE WAY FOR HIGH-LEVEL EXCHANGES.

¶5. TURNING TO THE PRC-BURMA NEXUS, THE INDIAN AMBASSADOR VOICED HIS GOVERNMENT'S CONCERN THAT CHINA MAY BE ALLOWED TO BUILD A NAVAL BASE ON THE ANDAMAN SEA COAST (SEPTEL HAS DETAILS). THAN SHWE BRUSHED AWAY THIS FEAR, NOTING THAT "BURMA LACKS THE MONEY FOR ANY JOINT BUILDING OF A NAVAL BASE" AND "CERTAINLY WON'T ALLOW CHINA OR ANY FOREIGN POWER TO HAVE A BASE HERE." WHEN THE INDIAN AMBASSADOR PURSUED PRC-BURMESE TIES FURTHER BY ASKING ABOUT THE ARMS RELATIONSHIP, THE HEAD OF STATE OBSERVED THAT "HIS COUNTRY HAD FEW ALTERNATIVES." CLOSING THE

SUBJECT, HE TOLD THE INDIAN AMBASSADOR NOT TO WORRY AS "BURMA IS ADEQUATELY CONCERNED ABOUT SOVEREIGNTY ISSUES." COMMENT: A WORLD-CLASS UNDERSTATEMENT.

¶6. GENERAL COMMENT: THAN SHWE CONTINUES TO IMPRESS US AS MORE INTERESTED IN PURSUING A LIBERAL COURSE THAN EITHER HIS PREDECESSOR SAW MAUNG OR KHIN NYUNT, AT LEAST BY BURMESE MILITARY STANDARDS. (A VIEW SHARED BY OTHER WESTERN EMBASSIES HERE.) THOUGH THIS HAS NOT LED TO AN OPEN SPLIT BETWEEN BURMA'S TWO TOP GUNS -- IN PART BECAUSE THE RULING GENERALS PERCEIVE A STRONG NEED FOR A UNITED PUBLIC FRONT -- THERE ARE QUASI-OVERT SIGNS OF FRICTION. FOR EXAMPLE, KHIN NYUNT RECENTLY TOOK THE UNUSUAL STEP OF COMPLAINING TO THE THAI AMBASSADOR ABOUT THE GOB'S (READ THAN SHWE'S) ADMISSION TO HOLDING POLITICAL PRISONERS. THIS ACTION, THE STRONGMAN CLAIMED, WAS CLEARED BY NEITHER MOFA NOR HIMSELF.

HUDDLE